

VZCZCXYZ0011
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHBU #0137/01 0401950
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 091950Z FEB 09
FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3005
INFO RUCNMER/MERCOSUR COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L BUENOS AIRES 000137

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/09/2038
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [AR](#)
SUBJECT: (C) ARGENTINA: SENATE PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE SAYS
GOA HAS LOST PUBLIC CONFIDENCE

REF: A. BUENOS AIRES 1038
[1](#)B. BUENOS AIRES 1215

Classified By: Classified by Ambassador Wayne for reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: With his customary candor, Senate President Pro Tempore Jose Pampuro, a moderate Peronist, told Ambassador Wayne February 4 that "the biggest problem" facing President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner's (CFK) administration is its inability to engage in dialogue with the opposition, noting that the GOA is now "paying the consequences" for its failings during the President's first year in office. Pampuro predicted this year's midterm elections would be close and could threaten the Victory Front's majority in both houses. Senator Pampuro said he would speak to CFK about sending a Senate delegation to the United States, per the Ambassador's suggestion. A top Kirchner official since 2003, Pampuro's frank remarks provide a more pessimistic take on CFK's first year in office and future prospects than we normally hear from senior GOA officials. End Summary.

On CFK's Performance, the Economy, and Future Prospects

[1](#)2. (C) In a candid exchange with Ambassador Wayne February 4, Senate President Pro Tempore Jose Pampuro, a moderate Peronist party member, described President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner's (CFK) first year in office as "very complicate," criticizing the GOA for its handling of the farm conflict which led to a more unified opposition (reftels). Pampuro said the CFK administration's "biggest problem" is its inability to work with the opposition to open up communication channels to ease tensions between the government and the farm sector. The Ambassador observed that lack of dialogue creates tension, potentially leading to violence like the February 2 incident when local farm producers threw eggs at Lower House majority leader Agustin Rossi and his brother Alejandro as they were leaving a town council meeting in Santa Fe province.

[1](#)3. (C) The Senator explained that during President Nestor Kirchner's administration (2003-2007), it was important to have a "strong man" as President to restore the public image of the Presidency as an institution, which was badly tarnished in the wake of the 2001 financial crisis when Argentina had five presidents in two weeks. He recalled the widespread hopes in late 2007 that CFK's administration would take Argentina to the next stage by opening up its economy and broadening its foreign policy. Unfortunately, the Kirchners have been unable to achieve this and now "are paying the consequences."

[1](#)4. (C) Referencing the difficult economic times that lie ahead, Pampuro said Buenos Aires province had already experienced a 15 percent reduction in its revenue collection.

He relayed that Central Bank President Martin Redrado told him recently that people are not applying for credit because they cannot afford, or are hesitant to make, the purchases. The Ambassador noted that the United States, Europe, and Japan are also facing economic challenges to an even greater degree than Argentina. Pampuro replied that the fact that Argentines are accustomed to tough times plays in their favor, while their greatest disadvantage is the economy's fragility. Pampuro said that unfortunately, the CFK administration has lost public confidence, particularly in the economic arena. He described CFK's wave of new

announcements as being of mixed utility.

15. (C) As to the midterm elections, he predicted the race would be very close, and doubted that the ruling Victory Front alliance (FpV) would win. He added that "we have to see how the GOA recovers from the economic crisis," and indicated that there may be "new faces" in government after the 2011 presidential race.

Increased Bilateral Collaboration

16. (SBU) The Ambassador relayed that the new U.S. administration provides opportunities for greater bilateral and regional collaboration. He added that although the economy remains the White House's top priority, the new administration wants to rebuild its foreign relations. The Ambassador pointed to the upcoming G-20 Summit and Summit of the Americas in April as a chance for the two Presidents to meet and an opportunity to expand bilateral collaboration at all levels. As an example, the Ambassador praised the current close collaboration with Argentina on fighting

terrorism, particularly in the Tri-Border area. He noted that cooperation could be expanded to include addressing other harmful criminal activity such as arms smuggling and money laundering that threaten Argentina and the region at large.

17. (SBU) The Ambassador suggested that the GOA consider sending a Senatorial delegation to the U.S., noting that several U.S. Senate delegations have visited Argentina in recent years, but their Argentine counterparts have yet to visit the United States. Pampuro, who said he visited the U.S. Senate in 2003 as Minister of Defense, readily supported the idea and said he would raise it with CFK, whom he thought would be amenable, as well as work with Juan Carlos Romero, president of the U.S. friendship committee, who wants to take a group to the United States. He added "we will organize something," but jokingly remarked that the schedule of some Senators, like presidential aspirant Senator Carlos Reutemann, may be "complicated." In response to the Ambassador's question on other potential areas of collaboration with the Congress, Pampuro remarked that a seminar on the economic crisis, possibly held with visiting U.S. economists, would be of great interest to Argentine Senators. He added that it would help them put domestic politics aside for a time and focus on the global context.

2009 Legislative Issues

18. (C) Pampuro relayed that the Senate will devote itself this year to addressing judicial, human rights, health reform, and environmental issues, in particular the protection of green spaces. He expected some tension between the provinces and the national government, noting that certain legislative issues pertained more to provincial than national needs. The Ambassador, in responding to Pampuro's question regarding his views of Argentina's new anti-money laundering law, said that Argentina has been a strong partner on money laundering and described the recently published fine print regulation on the law as a positive step. Pampuro agreed, but speculated that it was highly unlikely much money would return home to Argentina given the current economic context.

¶9. (SBU) Pampuro brings extensive experience in politics at the local and national levels to his post. After graduating from medical school, he practiced in Argentina and the United Kingdom. In 1983, he was appointed head of the Department of Health in Lanus city in Buenos Aires province. From 1987 to 1991 he served as the Peronist Party (PJ) representative for Buenos Aires province and from 1991 to 1992 he was Health and Social Welfare provincial minister. In 2002, he served as then-President Eduardo Duhalde's private secretary and in October became Secretary General of the Presidency, serving as Duhalde's cabinet chief until May 2003. In May 2003,

former president Nestor Kirchner named him as his new Minister of Defense, where he remained until October 2005. Pampuro was elected to the Senate on the FpV ticket in December 2005 and will complete his term in December 2011. In February 2006, he was elected Senate President Pro Tempore, making him second in line to the presidency. Born on November 28, 1949, Pampuro is married and has three children. He learned English while attending St. George's School in Quilmes. Later, as an adult, he spent nearly a year in London. Pampuro presents himself as a pragmatic Peronist who favors good ties with the U.S.

Comment

¶10. (C) A top Kirchner official since 2003, Pampuro's candid remarks provide a more pessimistic take on CFK's first year in office and future prospects than we normally hear from senior GOA officials. This is one more sign that the opposition is not alone in thinking that the Kirchner era may end with CFK's administration.

WAYNE